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ABSTRACT

This study explores counseling preferences of college students and their relationship to students' sex, major, and year in school. A questionnaire (Direction-Unconscious Motivation Scale) designed to assess attitudes toward psychoanalytic, behavioral therapy and client-centered counseling approaches was given to 683 volunteers who were students at two New York State Colleges. Results showed that students reported a greater preference for a psychoanalytic than a behavioral therapy approach. However, few participants were highly positive about any of the three counseling approaches in their entirety. Responses to many of the questionnaire items were related to sex and year, and indicated that most participants held preferences for seemingly contradictory or potentially conflicting counseling goals or techniques. The authors suggest that counseling centers include counselors who differ in treatment model and outlook, are sensitive to conflicting counseling needs, and can adapt their techniques to the unique patterns of preferences of different clients. (Author)

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Counseling Preferences Among College Students: New Directions For Change

Bert Cunin, Ph.D. Beth Hoffman Cunin, Ph.D.

Counselors and researchers have pointed out that counseling and psychotherapy have "failed to deliver" on their early promises. One way in which we might increase counseling effectiveness is by matching counselors and their approaches to individual clients, with their particular expectations, preferences and dislikes.

The present study explored counseling preferences of college students and their relationship to students' sex, major and year in school. A questionnaire (Direction-Unconscious Motivation Scale) designed to assess attitudes towards psychoanalytic, behavior therapy and client-centered counseling approaches was given to 683 volunteers who were students at two colleges in New York State.

Results showed that students reported a greater preference for a psychoanalytic than a behavior therapy approach ($p < .001$). However, few participants highly preferred any of the three counseling approaches in their entirety. Students preferred certain aspects of each of the models. Responses to many of the questionnaire items were related to sex and year (e.g., $p < .001$) and indicated that most participants held preferences for incompatible counseling goals or techniques.

The data suggests that counseling centers should include counselors who differ in treatment model and outlook, are sensitive to conflicting counseling needs, and can adapt their techniques to the unique patterns of preferences of different clients.

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Counseling Preferences Among College Students
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Counseling and clinical practitioners and researchers have pointed out that counseling and psychotherapy have "failed to deliver" on their early promises (Abroms & Greenfield, 1973). The frequent evidence of only "modest" positive gain through counseling and the high dropout rates with some (e.g. lower socioeconomic) groups of people (Heilbrun, 1973; Strupp & Bloxon, 1973) indicates that we have to make changes in our counseling strategies and treatment programs.

One direction for change is based on the idea that the same counselor and counseling model are not necessarily most effective for all persons. Instead, counselors, as well as their approaches, have to be matched to individual clients, with their particular expectations, preferences and dislikes (Heilbrun, 1973; Goldstein, 1962; Lazarus, 1973; Reisman, 1971).

The present study explored the counseling preferences of college students and their relationship to such variables as sex, major and year in college. More specifically, we investigated preferences for psychoanalytic, behavior therapy and client-centered counseling methods.

Design

Counseling preferences were studied with the aid of the Direction-Unconscious Motivation (D-U) Scale. The D-U Scale is an 18-item questionnaire which was designed to assess attitudes towards psychoanalytic, behavior therapy, and client-centered approaches (Reisman, 1971).

The questionnaire was given to 683 volunteers who were students at two private colleges in New York State. Both males (316) and females (367) participated in the study. The sample included humanities, social sciences, natural

sciences, business, education, medical technology and nursing students, as well as college students who were either mixed majors or had no declared major field of study.

Results

The results were analyzed with a series of ANOVAs appropriate to a 2 x 4 (sex x year) factorial design (there were no differences due to major). The findings showed that all groups of students reported a greater preference for a psychoanalytic than a behavior therapy approach ($F(1,421)=163.38$, $p<.001$; $F(1,246)=131.82$, $p<.001$). Students in their earlier years in college, in particular, showed greater preferences for a psychoanalytic method than did persons in their later college years ($F(3,421)=26.21$, $p<.001$; $F(3,246=15.59$, $p<.001$). In addition, most of those students who had a strong preference for any one of the three counseling or therapy models indicated agreement with a psychoanalytic form of treatment rather than a behavior therapy or client-centered method ($x^2(2)=94.41$, $p<.001$).

Further analysis indicated, however, that few participants (10%) highly preferred any of the three counseling approaches in their entirety. Instead, the students preferred, as well as disliked, certain critical aspects of each of the models. Some preferred features were: (1) The importance of talking about personal problems, discovering unconscious motives and underlying reasons for behavior, (2) the desire for being treated as an autonomous individual, and (3) the need for the counselor's support and encouragement.

The results also revealed that student responses to a great number of the questionnaire items were related to year in school and sex. For example,

students in their later college years agreed less with the idea that it is important to understand childhood influences on adult behavior than did participants in their early college years ($F(3,421)=4.59, p<.01$; $F(3,246=3.84, p<.01$). With increasing year in college, students also agreed less with the view that counselors should give advice and suggestions ($F(3,421)=4.29, p<.01$, $F(3,246)=3.34, p<.05$). In addition, females consistently preferred less directiveness from counselors than did male participants (e.g. $F(1,421)=12.62, p<.001$; $F(1,246)=5.18, p<.05$).

The responses to the individual items also suggested that most of the students, regardless of sex or year in college, had various preferences for counseling goals or techniques which could conflict with each other. For example, the great majority of students stated that they wanted to understand their unconscious motives (92%). Yet, most participants reported that they didn't want to wait a long time before showing improvement (77%), and preferred to receive direct advice and suggestions (84%).

Conclusions

The present study showed that there are definite differences in counseling preferences. Furthermore, the data revealed that the great majority of the college students did not completely agree with any of the three counseling approaches.

The results indicated that counseling centers or community mental health clinics could benefit from hiring counselors and psychotherapists who differ in their treatment models and outlooks. Treatment programs also could be staffed with persons who can work effectively with a variety of methods, and

who are flexible and innovative enough to adapt their techniques to the preferences of different clients.

The findings also suggest that counselors should be attuned to the seemingly contradictory or potentially conflicting needs that people may have when they enter counseling. Many college students, for example, may have needs for both independence and dependence. At times, the students may strive for autonomy and separation. Yet, at other times, they also may seek the counselor's support, direction and approval. Contradictory needs, such as those which stem from dependence-independence conflicts, could lead to dissatisfaction and, if not worked with, result in premature client termination.

Increased sensitivity to differences in counseling preferences and to problems caused by incompatible expectations held by clients should help counselors work more effectively with a wider variety and number of persons.